



Marine Contemporary

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littlewhitehead
Unfinished Business

The Twisted Art of littlewhitehead Interview by Francesca Gavin

Sigmund Freud defined the concept of the uncanny, or 'unheimlich', in an essay in 1919. He was describing the sensation of discomfort or displacement when familiar objects are made unfamiliar and emerge in forms that horrify and create a sense of profound unease. Uncanny objects make us aware of our repressed hidden selves. It is the sensation that can accompany dolls, puppets, mannequins, waxworks, robots, and even figurative sculpture in its widest sense. Things that are human and inhuman, dead and alive. Things that express collective anxiety. littlewhitehead's work fits perfectly into a vein of art that addresses the uncanny - artists like Mike Kelley, Hans Bellmer, Jake and Dinos Chapman and Cindy Sherman. The duo trained and are based in Glasgow but have an immediacy that is very different from the drier aesthetic approaches of the city. They strive and succeed to make work with an immediacy to it that functions alongside and before theory. These are artworks that move into an instinctive place first, touching on the darker (and darkly humorous) parts of our psyche.

One of the first things that hits viewers about your work is its sense of unease and the uncanny. What do you like about creating that sensation?

Working with realism usually involves some discussion about the uncanny. When you subvert what is familiar people also often feel uneasy. For us though, it's never our intention to make people feel that way. We don't sit and constantly think up new ways to make people feel uneasy, it's just a consequence of some of the methods we use.

How does humor play in to that process?

Humor is the main factor in our friendship and in turn, our collaborative process. It fuels everything we do and is present in all of our work. Most of this humor will be lost on viewers, but that doesn't matter. Making art is not our attempt to

be funny. We are not trying to make an audience laugh. This shared sense of humor is just the place we can best work through ideas, the place we feel most comfortable being creative.

Are you directly influenced by conceptual or structural ideas and approaches to comedy?

No. There are some comedians and TV shows that we have great appreciation for, and even share some aesthetic similarities with, but humor is never the starting point. It's also not about trying to dissect the mechanics of humor and use them as artistic tactics. What we find funny is often not intentionally comedic. The dialogue we have that leads to the making of a work is usually fuelled by our humor, but the dialogue is never about humor.

Tell me about process. How do you move from ideas to realization?

It usually always starts with something flippant. This can be an idea, a small drawing or even just discovering an image or object. If it's something that we are both excited by, it also has the possibility of becoming a work. A shared interest in a thing is crucial, without it the work would be too personal. It's then about developing upon that initial thing, through what would be a 'conversation' in our studio - experimenting with the thing, subjecting it to our childish ideas.

What do you find interesting about collaboration?

Collaboration makes the work feel familiar and foreign simultaneously. What at once feels like is mine is also not mine. As a result you give up the total control of the work before it goes on public display. For many artists, that will be the first time they let go of a work, when they exhibit it. For us it is long before. It is the moment an idea is said and responded to. Works develop through the conversation that when they are finished, it is near impossible to remember which aspects you attributed to it.

Lets talk about some of the pieces in the current show. How did the piece 'Failure' come together? 'Failure' is a combination of all our failed pieces of work over the last few years. It's a bit of a comic boulder of epic proportions. It's as much a monument to our persistence as it is to our shortcomings. Some of the items in the boulder have been exhibited before. But sometimes we only realize a work's failure once you see it in a show. Recycling our failed work is something we've always done. Initially it was a financial thing, but now it just seems more cathartic. One of the reasons the elements of Failure failed, is because we tried too hard to make them. Trying to make is often the curse of creativity.

What do you find interesting about the leftovers? The detritus of creative ideas?

They are essential, necessary to take the work to where you want it to go. Debris can also be more interesting than the finished work. But it's also about honesty. Understanding why something failed is very important in avoiding its reoccurrence.

What interests you about failure in a wider sense?

We're all going to fail. Repeatedly. Then die.

Your titles - Failure, Ambition - could be interpreted as commenting on the process of being an artist?

I think they comment just as much on being a human being.

How did you start working with stuffed figures and animals?

The figures were a shared obsession and an obvious starting point for our collaboration. By emulating Youtube special effects videos we could make figures worthy of any low budget B movie. We've only just started working with the animals - it's different with them compared

to the bodies. The bodies are usually trying to emulate and thus appear like real bodies. But the animals are just toy models. We don't make the animals nor do we try to make them look real. They are scale model toys we stumbled upon in LA in 2011. We knew immediately we had to buy one but then it took a while to work out what to do with it.

What appealed and still appeals about bodies?

We haven't worked overtly with bodies recently, but elements of figuration are still present within the work. We now don't ever set out intent on making a figurative work. We have in the past and we've found out when that is the case we usually don't like the outcome. I think we get bored of things quite easily, and often change the materials we use regularly, but figures seem to be the ground we return to most often.

There is an implication of violence in your work - or the aftermath of violence. Is that intentional?

Violence is a process we often use in the making of a work. We've burnt objects, attacked others with acid and vandalized them. These making processes share similarities with the violent excesses of physical comedy. Similarly, I think the violence that is present within final compositions is often blackly comic but audiences often misconstrue such things.

You seem to be drawn in particular to the relationship between the body and the wall.

What do you find interesting about implying a break or fissure in a gallery context?

It likely relates to our inherent desire to be painters. We've tried again and again to paint but always failed. I suppose sticking stuff on a wall is really just an admission of our failure.

How did you start working with found photographs? What kind of imagery are you drawn to?

We've always worked with found photographs. Found images fill the walls of our studio. A lot of what we do with them usually stems from boredom. We deface something and blow it up. Previously we have blown up images from various sources - The Sunday Times supplements, retail publications, local papers. The photos in the exhibition are also blown up but finding them was a little more serendipitous. They are all images from a British man's holiday to the US in the late 1970's. They are snapshots of everyday Americana that felt completely foreign to his eyes.

How does the influence of cinema emerge in your work? What kind of films are you looking at?

Most of the sculpture skills we have are actually movie and theatre skills. We are huge fans of B movie special effects. Cinema is a huge source of inspiration - from appropriating scenes, compositions and music. There are some genres of movie we are particularly interested in - 80's action movies, post-apocalyptic B movies and 90's erotic thrillers.

Is the idea of fiction something you are playing with?

Fiction is present within a lot of our work. It can be a composition that hints at a possible fictional narrative, or a description of how the work was made that questions the authenticity of the object. Fiction completely informs the reality we inhabit as human beings, whether that is news media narratives or product advertising. I think audiences want, and to some extent expect, some bizarre truth when they encounter art, but it's sometimes best just to lie to them.

How do you approach materials?

A lot of our work uses different materials and methods. The more we work together, the easier it is to spot the constant factors present within our work - the things that make the work uniquely ours. For us, that always comes back to the collaboration and the dialogue. It is through that ongoing conversation that everything materializes.

Do you see your work as part of the traditions and arguments around sculpture?

We would always say we are artists before describing ourselves as sculptors. There aren't any materials we wouldn't consider working with, but other than that, our concerns are more personal. For us, the collaboration is the important discussion - what occurs once the work is resolved enough to be exhibited is not our concern.

Do you want to annoy people? It is a word that has come up in past interviews.

We likely annoy our neighbors. We hope we annoy our neighbors.

Talk to me about death. How has this emerged as a theme in your work?

It's the great common denominator. As a theme it's something that reoccurs in many of our works. It's likely connected to our sense of humor. Death, failure, ambition - maybe the only way to take them seriously, is to laugh at them.

littlewhitehead

littlewhitehead is Craig Little (b. 1980, Glasgow, Scotland) and Blake Whitehead (b. 1985, Lanark, Scotland). littlewhitehead are children of the 80s: brought up on a diet of video nasties, computer games and the post-industrial landscape of socialist Glasgow. Their sculptures and drawings are the product of a very idiosyncratic and private dialogue. As a result, all of their work is steeped in their very own brand of humor. It is through such humor they manage to negate any particular ideological position, and instead try to foster reflection on many ontological and ideological absurdities. Past shows include Newspeak: British Art Now at Saatchi Gallery, London and a solo show at Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland. Recent shows include, Constructions at Helene Bailly, Paris, The Cyclic Gate at Sumarria Lunn, London, How Art Things at Nest Gallery, The Hague, Netherlands. littlewhitehead were included in the book "100 New Artists" by U.K. critic Francesca Gavin. "100 New Artists" highlights new themes, media, imagery, and ideas emerging in contemporary art practice. littlewhitehead currently live and work in Glasgow.

Recent Solo Exhibitions include:

- 2013
 - Unfinished Business, Marine Contemporary, Los Angeles
- 2012
 - The Cyclic Gate, Sumarria Lunn, London
- 2011
 - Bad News, Marine Contemporary, Los Angeles
- 2010
 - littlewhitehead, Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland
 - The Gilt Hole Complex, Arcan Mellor, London
- 2009
 - The Black Smoke Machine Gun Club, The Royal Standard, Liverpool
 - The Fourth Wall, Bloc, Sheffield
 - Playing Dog, Gimpel Fils, London
 - So Many Fellows Find Themselves, K Gallery / Milan
 - So This Is Romance, Bunhouse Bandits, London
- 2008
 - Nothing Ever Happens Here, Studio Warehouse, Glasgow
 - It was gone, Project Slogan, Aberdeen

Recent Group Exhibitions include:

- 2013
 - Easy Does It, David Dale Gallery, Glasgow
 - Supermarket 2013, Kulturhuset, Stockholm
 - Be a Man, Sumarria Lunn, London
- 2012
 - KUNSTVLAAI, INexactly THIS, Sint Nicolaas Lyceum, Amsterdam
 - Santorini Biennale, Santorini, Greece
 - Preposterous, La Scatola Gallery, London
 - Constructions, Helene Bailly Paris, Paris
 - How Art Things? Nest, the Hague
 - The Momentarily Absurd: Humour in Contemporary Art, High House Gallery, Oxfordshire, England
 - Tennancy 3, Blackartprojects, Melbourne
- 2011
 - Boundaries, Gazelli Art House @ C99 Art Project, London
 - In Your Face, SHOWstudio, London
 - 100, Langford 120, Melbourne
 - Six Degrees, Monks Gallery, Lincolnshire, England
 - Revenge of the Pleasure Principle, KT Contemporary, Dublin
 - Air I Breath, Gazelli Art House, London
 - Modern Frustrations, Sumarria Lunn, London
 - Between Worlds, Field, Folkestone Triennial, Folkestone
 - British Art Now, Museum of South Australia, Adelaide
 - If these walls could talk, Charlie James Gallery, Los Angeles
 - If these walls could talk, Marine, Los Angeles
 - Modern British Sculpture, Gimpel Fils, London
 - Smokefall, Tintype, London
- 2010
 - Prop, Departure Gallery, London
 - Exteriority, Sumarria Lunn Gallery, London
 - Figure Study, Gimpel Fils, London
 - Space Made Live, The Arthouse, Glasgow
 - Newspeak: British Art Now, Saatchi Gallery, London
 - A Ticket For A Ticket, Trolley Gallery, London
 - Downstairs Review Part II, Gimpel Fils, London
- 2009
 - Newspeak: British Art Now, The Hermitage, St. Petersburg
 - Tales That Witness Madness, Elevator Gallery, London
 - Alternative States, Gimpel Fils, London
 - Nine days, seventeen hours, thirty two minutes, six seconds, Eleven Howland LTD, London
 - Grey Matter, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh
 - Wild is the Wind, Wall, London
- 2008
 - Bloomberg New Contemporaries, A Foundation, London
 - Conjunction 08, Stoke-on-Trent



Ambition
Two ski masks,
Dimensions variable, 2013

Failure
Failed works of art (2007– present)
and glue, Dimensions variable, 2013



Tail, Tail, Tail
Site Specific Installation,
Toy chihuahuas,
Dimensions variable, 2013





Tail, Tail, Tail
Installation View 1



Tail, Tail, Tail
Installation View 2



Wild Childs

Two handmade faux leather jackets
with hand stitched personalized name
tags, modified wooden hangers and
nails, Dimensions variable, 2013



Wild Childs
Detail 1



Wild Childs
Detail 2



Pink Fountains (3 photographs)
Inkjet prints, Edition of 1 + 1AP,
27.5" x 107", 2013



Untitled
Inkjet print, Edition of 1 + 1AP,
20" x 27.5", 2013



Untitled
Inkjet print, Edition of 1 + 1AP,
20" x 27.5", 2013



Untitled
Inkjet print, Edition of 1 + 1AP,
20" x 27.5", 2013



Our Pleasure (12 photographs)
Inkjet prints, Edition of 1 + 1AP,
109" x 107", 2013



Untitled
Inkjet print, Edition of 1 + 1AP,
20" x 27.5", 2013



Untitled
Inkjet print, Edition of 1 + 1AP,
20" x 27.5", 2013



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Unfinished Business
Installation



Marine Contemporary

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