

this is tomorrow

Contemporary Art Magazine

P/N/15: Ruairiadh O'Connell

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Review by Marie d'Elbee



O'Connell engaged with the interior space.

A light box beckons in the night. Two luminous shapes ooze phosphorescent ripples reminiscent of water or light waves. The inside of the space's door and windows is covered with security grids which hold fragments of plaster stamped with a red imprint of hair.

Project/Number works with artists on solo projects and simultaneously commissions a site-specific image for a light box that sits above the entrance to the space overlooking the street. For this latest show, Juliette Bonneviot created the light box image while Ruairiadh

Bonneviot's work drifts from one click to the other as she codes and decodes data and lifestyles through the web's constantly moving mesh. She transforms these fluctuating informations into art objects, thus fixing them in time. In this work the artist gives importance to materials that are not initially designed to be noticed and focuses on the recyclable container, on 'the banal material that would briefly host a pop imagery or slogan.' The image is part of a wider project, 'Minimal jeune fille', which is inspired by an internet community of eco-housewives who use industrial strategies to attain a 'zero waste' holy Grail. The project follows this 'jeune fille' who, as she strives to attain this minimal perfection, entangles herself in the darkness of her mass industry-fuelled eco-war.

Ruairiadh O'Connell decided to make all his work for the show inside the gallery the week before its opening, although his research and preparation took several months. 'He understood the nature and the ethos of P/N straight away' explains Chris Rawcliffe, director of the space, 'and used his time here to experiment, make new work and embrace the architecture of the gallery.'

O'Connell's previous works stem from his research into the psychological influence of design, whether it be in clothes, architecture or interior furnishings. He is known to work with heavy patterns, like those of psychedelic casino carpets which, conceived to trigger alertness and excitement, incite people to adopt risky behaviours and spend more money. He has also engaged with furnishing designs of 1960s planes which were aimed at soothing people who were at the time often terrified by the idea of flying. During a recent performance, O'Connell recited 4th-century BC love curses accompanied by the experimental New York musicians Droids, the projection of words hauled up from an ancient world, in front of a contemporary audience.

For this show, O'Connell continues to explore the narrative potential of abstraction through material. This work is inspired by Greek curse tablets, 'katadesmos'. This name is derived from the idea of 'tying up' or 'binding down', which is the effect the spell was hoped to have on the targeted victim. These tablets, made usually with clay, hair and often accompanied by cryptic inscriptions, were used to make their idea of love happen, trapping or forcing one into feeling another's way. Often kept hidden or buried, these objects were so obscure that only their actual author could really know what they meant. Exhibiting O'Connell's fragments in vivid light and for all to see is like a gestural reversal of the tablets' historical usage. The objects are re-activated in their meaning and their use.

The clay and the plaster leaks rust where it encounters the metal grid like a reminder that matter is not inert. The imprint of a rain jacket on one side of the plaster fragment gives the impression of being alive or of having been worn, the details of its undulating cloth trapped in the plaster. The security grids of the artist's work, which ironically keep the gallery safe, evoke the ties of relationship and reflect on ways to keep it together. Moreover there is an intricate link between the way a sculpture works as its materials bond together, and the idea of entanglement and attachment.

Project/Number playfully allies in this show the idea of a re-discovered language exhumed and brought to light with that of a glowing recyclable plastic aesthetic. The objects of this beautiful exhibition are like vessels or travel capsules carrying a distinct time, web and space.