

TATE BRITAIN

Strange Solution

Karla Black
Alice Channer
Dee Ferris
Anthea Hamilton
Katy Moran

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ART
NOW

Essay

A connecting thread between these five artists is that their diverse works originate from found objects, images or materials taken from the everyday. In varying degrees, these elements are amended, transformed or simply placed together so that they retain a sense of their original function, but also take on new meaning. Often there is a deliberate tension set up between the work's materiality, form and implied (or denied) source. There appears to be a shared economy of means utilised, a process of reduction and abstraction that results in a pared-down aesthetic. The intention is not to offer a direct representation of a chosen subject or scene, but to offer a sense of an emotion, state of being, or an experience of a time and place. The work has a personal quality and narratives are evoked but never spelled out.

Karla Black's substantial yet ethereal sculpture, *Wish List* (2008) seems casually suspended, yet its size, form and placement is carefully related to the architectural setting. The raw sugar paper is saturated with strangely familiar substances and tones, but the list of materials – chalk, ribbon, hair gel, nail varnish, plaster, paint, petroleum jelly, polythene, rubber glove - are more commonly found in the domestic domain than in an art gallery.

For Black, making the work involves 'physical explorations into thinking, feeling, communicating and relating. The sculptures are parts of an ongoing learning or search for understanding, through material experience that has been prioritised over language'. In other works Black has used foodstuffs and household cleaners as well as make-up, all substances that denote the sensation of touch. Black's focus on the experimental, performative gesture to form the work perhaps relates to her interest in Austrian-born British psychoanalyst Melanie Klein (1882-1960) who innovatively used direct play and interaction with children to formulate theories of infant



development, thus prioritising experience over language. In Black's final piece there is a delicate poise between its fragile vulnerability and robust autonomy as a finished object.

Karla Black
Wish List 2008
Installation view, Tate, London
Photo credit: Thierry Bal

The energetic small-scale canvasses by Katy Moran, painted in acrylic, start with an image taken from a variety of sources – the internet, her mobile phone camera, junk shop pictures and magazines. She turns the picture upside down to avoid creating a literal description of the scene and works intensely until the rich, sumptuous colours and thick brushstrokes loosely indicate figurative images. These take their clues from titles such as *Carla's Garden* (2007) and *I Dream of Miami* (2007).



Katy Moran
Carla's Garden 2007
Courtesy the artist and Stuart Shave/Modern Art, Photo credit: Todd White and Son

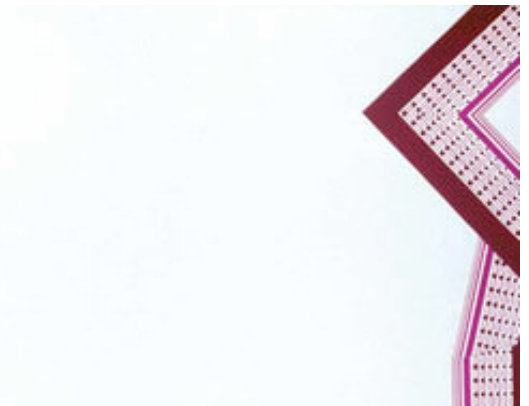
'They're finished when I can see a figurative element in them ... through the paint I'm searching for the thing it reminded me of, or suggested to me, and trying to get close to that thing.' The exuberant spontaneity of the gesture is genuine rather than contrived, Moran comments, 'When I'm making a painting, I get quite excited by how close to awful I can push it, while getting something quite lovely from it as well'.

As a reference for her conviction that 'somehow unintentional paintmarks convey a more convincing reality,' she cites painter Francis Bacon's comment

during an interview with art historian David Sylvester, 'An illustrational form tells you through the intelligence immediately what the form is about, whereas non-illustrational form works first on sensation and then slowly leads back into the fact.'

Alice Channer describes her works as "'markers" in space' – wall paintings, sculptures, live performance and works on paper that are reminiscent of a functional object, often something found in the realm of fashion. 'For me the start point of the work is always another thing, an object that already exists in the world, and working out a way to respond to it by making another object.'

As the title suggests her *Scarf Drawings* (2007) take their visual motif from abstract patterning found on classic head or neck scarves. *The New Look* (2007) uses actual clothing materials and tailoring techniques. It comprises two long sections of grey, professionally pleated pocketing material that run from top to bottom of a wall and are usually installed separately to frame work by



other artists. Yet these works have a distinct formal presence that goes beyond their connection to familiar, quotidian items. One piece goes further, existing somewhere between an artwork and a practical item of clothing. The work consists of dresses based on Yves Saint Laurent designs from the 1960s and is worn by actors who have been invited to attend at various times during the exhibition. The piece aims to exist right at the edges of the show.



Alice Channer
Scarf Border Drawing 2007
Courtesy the artist and the Dicksmith Gallery /
Courtesy Dicksmith Gallery © Alice Channer

The seductively coloured and densely worked surfaces of Dee Ferris's paintings possess a unique visual quality that sits somewhere between kitsch and a flawed, contemporary sublime. The language of commodity culture offers a source for the works – images from sales catalogues and travel brochures that offer the aspirations of consumerism. 'The images I create come from my fascination with Arcadian promises that are plastered over our billboards and TV screens. I like to take elements from these generic propositions and reorganise them to produce paradoxical visions.'



Dee Ferris
Pipe Dreams and Sweet Sweet Bulbs 2006
Private Collection, London, Courtesy Corvi-Mora,
London

Thin layers of washes and glazes are applied and reworked over time resulting in a strange, sensuous opacity that in recent work completely obliterates the blurred figures and landscapes. Yet the dream-like state and emotional exploitation of these artificial images is conveyed in the abstract, reinforced by extravagantly romantic titles such as, *Endless Numbered Days* (2007) and *Pipe Dreams and Sweet Sweet Bulbs* (2006). In these paintings an exquisite tension exists between her sickly sweet palette and a darker, more disturbing range of colours that simultaneously seduce and repel in a constant ebb and flow that ensures they remain just out of reach.

Through an eclectic combination of mannequin parts, organic materials and found objects, Anthea Hamilton playfully

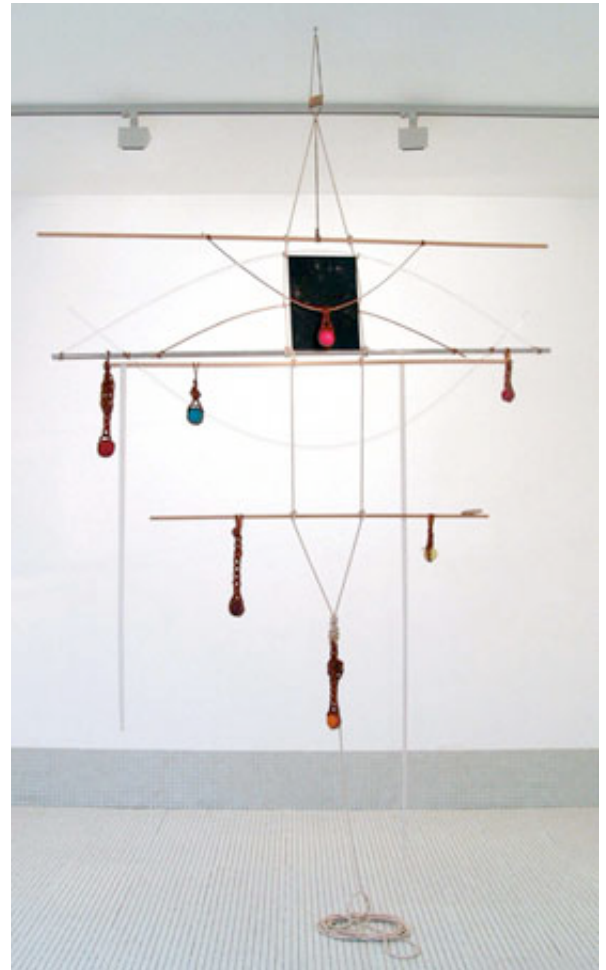
explores a unique sculptural language with a knowing nod to the Surrealist tradition. These seemingly makeshift works can be seen as three-dimensional collages, carefully composed to confidently occupy the exhibition space and offer a different viewpoint at every angle. A flat cross section of a leg, modelled after the artist's own, is a recurring motif becoming a cipher for a bodily presence in relation to an unexpected selection of objects. Strange juxtapositions allude to gender and sexuality – in a witty contemporary take on the fetishisation of primitive

and exotic objects.

The weightless, hanging sculpture *Untitled (Odile)* (2006) is a cross between a child's mobile and a torturous gym apparatus, structured by horizontal bars between lengths of rope. Objects such as billiard balls are suspended in a balanced equilibrium so that each possesses its own space and associations yet together form a unified composition. Individual works exist independently yet collectively they form an alternative reality that alludes to the artist's own identity. Ultimately the interpretation remains open for the viewer to project their own narratives and fantasies.

What is the question that lies behind the 'Strange Solution' suggested in the title? Perhaps the dilemma of how to add another object into the world that as an artwork offers new meanings and revelatory thinking, while offering some response and relation to the lives we inhabit and experience visually. All of these artists meet this challenge in a distinct and thought provoking manner.

Katharine Stout



Anthea Hamilton
Untitled (Odile) 2006
Courtesy the artist and IBID PROJECTS