

# Chaste Glances Signify Missed Chances

05<sup>th</sup> June – 27<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Supercollider, Blackpool

Blackpool has long been in need of a PR makeover. The time may just be right. The football club has just reached the heady heights of the Premiership. The Grundy art gallery has been quietly transforming the expectations of the arts community in the town in recent years and, since 2008, a small independent curatorial space, run on a shoestring as a labour of love by curator/artist Tom Ireland has offered an introduction to a critically engaged contemporary art practice and attempted to raise its profile still further.

Supercollider is the antithesis of the white cube space. This small reclaimed 2<sup>nd</sup> floor office space bears all the traces of its former use, including a pockmarked tangerine wall (A homage to the Seaside?). However, the space and the décor belie Ireland's serious ambition.

*Chaste Glances Signify Missed Chances* is an exhibition of new work by Manchester based artist Samantha Donnelly. Her installation based practice takes as its inspiration a photograph by French fashion photographer Guy Bourdin and British artist Victor Burgin's *Office at Night*, a series of works that examine the ideological nature of desire. In drawing our attention to her sources of inspiration Donnelly foregrounds her interests but there is little inscribed in the works themselves that draw you back to her sources.

There is in Bourdin's use of the surreal incongruous juxtaposition an echo in her own practice but Bourdin's objectification of the female form is a point of departure. Burgin's reworking of Edward Hopper's *Office at Night* is a tightly constructed analysis of the power relationships between subject/object and viewer. Burgin foregrounds the female secretarial worker as a subject and the ideogrammatic information graphics reveal the ideological parameters that circumscribe these relationships. Donnelly's interest lies in Burgin's intellectual critique.

*Rear View When Facing Forward* consists of a set of light wooden frames, they have the appearance of stands, for nothing in particular; indeterminate signifiers. They are propped, facing forwards, against the wall trapping a scrap of leather. The frames have been covered in a fabric membrane smeared with fake tan. The membrane gathers in folds on the floor like ersatz taffeta. There's much to commend here in the attempt to find an abstract language capable of communicating, as Donnelly puts it, 'the liminal space between expectation and reality', but it wants for a bolder resolution. In Blackpool of all places the space between real and inauthentic, between expectation and reality is laid bare for all to see.

*Compel to Place* is altogether more successful. A sculpture assemblage of found and bespoke constructions that includes a stack of plaster forms, that bring to mind pads and prosthetics in Caucasian skin tones, wrapped in cotton webbing and placed on a found steel stool. Something borrowed, something new. The space that Donnelly seeks to explore is much clearer here and if Burgin's work explores the 'organisation of sexuality within capitalism' then Donnelly aims to explore its material construction

Donnelly also exhibits three collages. There is a lightness of touch in *Limb Receives Limb 1 and 2* in which the limbs hang suspended and bound by a mobius loop to form a sculptural assemblage. *An Agenda of Type* is a surreal collage and it sits in an inexpensive white frame, propped on a wooden shelf on which an amorphous clay blob squats and drips. The clay form is pigmented with spray tan, blusher and varnish. The image within the frame puts one in mind of

Sarah Lucas. The presentational strategies and clumsy veneer deliberately examine an awkward 'wrongness', an uneasy makeover.

Chaste Glances Signify Missed Chances is a fascinating show. Donnelly's work is ambitious and her critical enquiry is sincere. Her work may not be best served by the limitations of Supercollider's obvious shortcomings as an exhibition space but in truth the venue demands a more direct negotiation with the space. Supercollider may not be a 'clean well lit space' nevertheless it is a worthy addition to the North West's curatorial spaces. In its own small way, it has the capacity to transform the cultural ambitions of Blackpool and, if the town can boast a Premiership football club, perhaps it should also be keen to accommodate a site that aims to incubate cutting edge contemporary arts practice.

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