RUPERT ACKROYD

Inn, inn, Inn.

Marsden Woo Project Space
1 November to 22 December 2012

Rupert Ackroyd investigates everyday environments and the ordinary objects that are a backdrop to daily life. By lifting commonplace tropes of interior décor and associated items out of their usual syntax of use and display, and repositioning them within a space of heightened awareness - the gallery - he highlights the ways they serve as cultural signs. The title of one past work Moon Under Water (an installation for Malta Contemporary Art in 2009) was derived from a chain of Weatherspoons pubs, themselves named after an essay by George Orwell, in which the writer provided a detailed description of his ideal public house. In this installation Ackroyd introduced local cultural references into a complex layering of artefacts, past and present, to explore the creation of meaning within this public sphere of sociability. Another work Large Assemblage (shown at Dicksmith Gallery in 2010), was a composite of the different manners of high street retail design, where corporate claims in matters of heritage and localism are articulated through visual detail.

Ackroyd’s new installation Inn, inn, Inn defines the English Public House as an idea associated with a particular set of forms and surfaces. It is, he notes, a visual language that offers a tangible connection to the past, and one that has proved open to fresh inflection. The central framework of the installation is a three way dialogue between different types of oak structure. The first, an aged beam, references the original version of the Inn, a domestic space born out of medieval vernacular architecture; the second an adzed oak post references the revival of the Inn format in the early twentieth-century along the ‘Improved’ lines favoured by architects of the day (they helped to popularize a form of ‘Tudor’ architecture in the 1920s and ‘Georgian’ architecture in the ‘30s); the third element is a synthetic ‘rustic’ Jacobean-style beam that references the overtly themed environment of the post-war ‘Heritage’ pub and its more recent manifestations run by large retail leisure providers, but which still seek to evoke an idea of the traditional hostelry.

In addition to the resonance of deep England set up in the installation’s framing structure of oak (part authentic, part reproduction, part simulacrum) he introduces a further lexicon of materials and forms. The panelled partition running through the centre of the room is a pine reconstruction proceeding from a 19th-century rendering of an original 17th-century design in oak. It’s inner space becomes a cosy ‘snug’, while its outer face remains a pragmatic set. Other material and stylistic fits, frictions and ruptures are represented by a wall of oak wine barrels (authentic, although temporarily retired from their intended function), which seal a space that contains a pile of yellow cheese powder (a material that references industrialised food production) upon a section of herringbone brick commonly found as a decorative infill beneath bar counters. A single oak column candle-stand (based on a design currently favoured by All Bar One) represents just the latest employment of the oak beam as signifier of an undifferentiated past. The overall dynamic of Ackroyd’s material selections and sculptural propositions equates to the ad hoc layered surfaces built up in pubs over time to form a semi-imagined historical narrative.

This reflection on the English pub is underpinned by affection rather than parody. It draws attention to an expression of English cultural character, along with the significance and meaningfulness that accompany an often unselfconscious use of certain motifs and surfaces which, because of their unobtrusive familiarity, are usually overlooked. As Ackroyd puts it: ‘Inn, inn, Inn views the pub as a direct continuation of forms of sociability with centuries old origins … and positions the pub at the heart of the communities that produced it. Specifically the installation focuses on how these traditions have been reinterpreted and redeployed over time.’

Recent exhibitions include: A collaborative work with Matthew Derbyshire exhibited as part of the T Rooms installation at Tramway, Glasgow and the Zabludowicz Collection Gallery, London (2012); Garage Project with Daniel Pasteiner at Rod Barton Gallery; Green Oak Aqua Modern, a collaborative installation with Alison Turnbull at the Russian Club Gallery; Romeo, with Owen Bullet, for the Art House Foundation (all London, 2011); Large Assemblage (solo), Dicksmith Gallery, London; Boom, Hotel Gallery, London; Recent British Sculpture, Grimm Gallery, Amsterdam (all 2010); Alistair Frost/Stuart Elliot/Rupert Ackroyd, Dicksmith Gallery, London; Club Room, Russian Club Gallery, London; Moon Under Water (solo), Malta Contemporary Art, Malta (all 2009); Cabinet Particular, Russian Club Gallery, London; St Mark’s Church, Islington, London; Napoleon Garde – Site for Contemporary Sculpture, Holland Park, London (all 2008); The Search for a Space, three-part group show, Valetta, Malta; Strangelove Studios, John’s Mews, London (2007).

Marsden Woo Project Space is curated by Tessa Peters.

The Marsden Woo Project Space runs alongside our programme of solo and small group exhibitions by gallery artists. The Project Space allows us to respond quickly to significant bodies of innovative work and showcases the work of talented emerging artists and designers and fresh directions in the work of more established artists. The exhibitions are organised at short notice, so please check our website regularly for news on forthcoming shows and events.