

FIGGIS, LAURENCE; UNTITLED, SPRING 2004

LORNA MACINTYRE

ILLUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

Switchspace, Glasgow
2–12 October 2003

Reviewed by Laurence Figgis

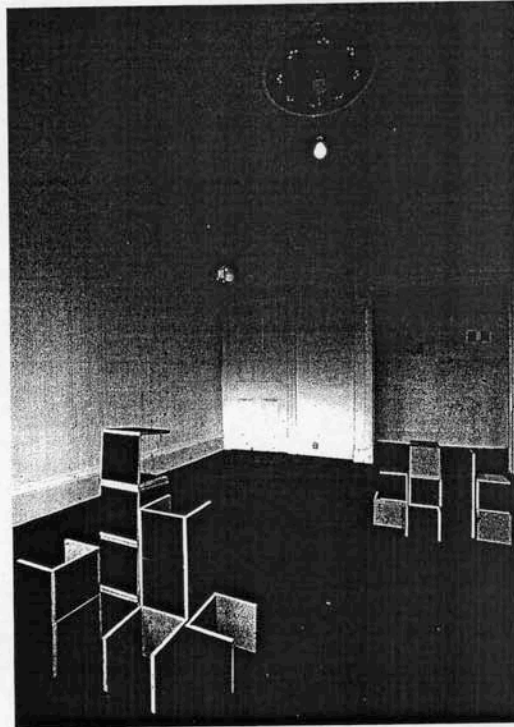
Predominantly confined to a single room of a disused tenement flat in the East End of Glasgow, the illusions in question were somewhat Spartan in their conspicuous forms, Macintyre's tragic denials being fabricated not from trompe l'oeil and fake pearls but from photocopy ink, chipboard and ball-point pen. Slyly inverting the baroque connotations of her title, Macintyre conjured a prevailing deception of utilitarian subtlety, against which a more fantastical imagination struggled for breath like a weed, gradually emerging in such features as a transformed ceiling rose and a delicate reproduction in biro of a Hieronymus Bosch detail. But even these prettifying aspects were held in check by morbid irony, and the tableau seemed pointedly minimal, considering the repeated allusions to cultural clutter.

Encompassing sculpture, found objects and direct modification of the ubiquitous 'alternative space', austerity was present not only in the abject materials and sparse arrangement of objects, but in an insistent cloaking of the fantastic, with layers of rationalising media. As an interesting example, the Bosch drawing [derived from the left wing of the *St Anthony* triptych] appeared to have been made from the photocopy of a book or journal, its asymmetrical composition revealing a border of compressed pages at one side.

Many of the found images, such as those displayed in a deep-set alcove to the left of the entrance, related not to individual art works but to museum interiors, stately homes and seminal avant garde installations. The Xeroxes, quietly manipulated to form doubled mirror reflections of themselves, covered two sheets of paper like spreading curatorial butterfly wings upon which academic captions were stencilled in graphite and paint. They also served as indexes to many of the fabricated works, suggesting low-fi impersonations of those brimming high-cultural storehouses where quixotic fictions and portals onto other worlds are as plentiful and disenchanting as factory-line objects.

The artistic hoards of John Soane's Museum, and Pollock House were lampooned here in the manner of Dada by the ignominious, through weirdly charming little chipboard artefacts piled into tottering Babel towers in the centre of the room, (the ominously titled *Museum for Black and Museum for White*). The walls of these ragged toy-town institutes of binary ethics and municipal prowess were painted black on one side. In the case of the less virtuous institute, they had their painted sides turned inwards; vice versa for the reciprocal white museum, which had a single chamber nullified with gloss paint at its heart.

The idea of a delusion or sham was continued in the metaphor of a gaudy ersatz veil, the model-maker's hues daubed on the ceiling rose and dedicated 'For the woman who sang to me in my sleep'. Here, above a naked bulb fighting the daylight, humbrol enamels of turquoise, purple, crimson and gold admitted defeat against the old paint congealed on



Lorna MacIntyre, *Illusions of grandeur*, 2003

bourgeois mouldings, renouncing them as crude plastic-looking blobs. In the lumpish paucity of definition to which it had been reduced, the rose acquired the appearance of something cheaply fabricated in miniature, a dolls house furnishing, or a gelatinous confection. This dream-like confusion of scale and its lineage in juvenile surrealist fiction was further called to mind by the small convex mirror positioned high in one corner which telescoped all of its reflected objects (the viewer included) into a shrunken otherworldly space.

Here as with many instances of the theme in art and literature, a quixotic sensibility was grounded in the very pragmatic materials from which it would take flight. Judging by the nature of her references, Macintyre is in sympathy with the grand illusionists, though she retained a significant quality of pragmatic restraint to ensure 'magic' had its syntax throughout. The images selected in the found postcards and photocopies were not random ephemera but historically specific citations. An allusion to the 'First International Dada Fair' in a doubled Xerox was particularly noteworthy as an example of the currently occluded roots of the installation form in absurdist fantasy as opposed to socially functional conceptualism or vacuous 'explorations of a space'. Above all, Macintyre seemed acutely wary of the potential minefield of emotional clichés housed by the abandoned tenement with its ghosts and cornices, its domestic traces and still tangible personal lives. Consequently the grossest self-indulgences allowed by this site-specific Antoinette were a glowing blood-red floor and a modicum of Airfix paint.