

# Mary Mary

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## Karla Black

Mary Mary, Glasgow  
15 April – 19 May

In this, the opening exhibition at the impressive new Mary Mary gallery, Karla Black has created three new works made in direct response to the gallery space. The first is a human-scale amorphous shape, a free standing draped and painted cardboard structure; the second is a paper construction suspended on thin ribbons like a hammock, containing powder and precariously balanced broken glass. The third work is a large rectangular layer of powder covering the gallery floor. There is evidence of small-scale interventions: areas have been patted down or rearranged, things have been embedded in the powder, chunks of make-up have been thrown, and there are various blobs and stains of colour.

Within these works are materials not generally associated with sculptural practice; face powder, Vaseline, toilet paper, hair gel, and nail varnish are mixed together with more recognisable materials such as paper, paint, and plaster. There is an element of fragility about each of these works, together with a subtle use of colour in the form of skin tones and pastel shades.

Messy girlie stuff has been going on. It seems that various ambiguous physical acts have taken place and there is the overriding sense of a missed perform-

ance. We are also very aware of the restraints placed on the viewer by the delicate nature of the work – like the desire to step on to an untouched carpet of snow, but within this gallery context, we know that would be wrong... It is this push and pull inside the head of the viewer that illustrates Black's interest in psychoanalysis, and the investigative dimension is ultimately a major part of the work.

Black is interested in our human response to mess, waste and unformed matter, and how this creates a dialogue for the viewer. Her work seems to playfully allude to bad behaviour, allowing a pseudo-voyeuristic window into the intimacies of someone else's life. As we are bombarded by the superficial façade that is the celebrity or rock 'n' roll lifestyles, or the supposed glamour of the art world, we are also increasingly more cynical to the opposite side of that glamour – what goes on behind the scenes, the mucky side. There are certain things in life that are great levellers, and maybe we are all pretty much the same in front of our bathroom mirrors.

It is the small subtle subversions and the scope to allow the freedom of the imagination that makes this

work intriguing. Black's work is the antithesis of the macho posturings of so much art that has gone before. She is well aware of where her work sits within the art historical context of feminist performance and movements like Abstract Expressionism or Land Art. She deals unashamedly with the detritus of female routines where flimsiness and delicateness are deliberately made a feature of, pre-empting what might previously have encouraged criticism.

Now, fortunately, we seem to have come full-circle, where male and female artists can relax in the knowledge that there is credibility to be gained in exploring the subjective and even the feminine, and hopefully there are indeed more opportunities for girls.

**Janie Nicoll**

Left: Karla Black, *Now is the time to normalise*, cardboard, paint, concealer stick, hemp hand cream, 190x105x60cm, 2006. Photo: Alan Dimmick. Courtesy: the Artist and Mary Mary, Glasgow.

Rights: Karla Black, *Early Equals Deep* (detail), diprobase cream, polythene bag, toilet paper, kitchen paper, towel, sugar paper, chalk, plaster, petroleum jelly, glass, face powder, concealer stick, nail varnish, 5x6.5m, 2006. Photo: Alan Dimmick. Courtesy: the Artist and Mary Mary, Glasgow

